

What's Love Got to Do With It?

Agape love is often defined as what we do for others, as if it can only exist in relation to others on the horizontal level. This is only partially true. The truth is, we received it on the vertical level. The capacity to have this love for others comes from God. In the Bible, it is a fruit of the Spirit. This means we cannot have it without the Spirit of Christ within us. It is something that we acquire from God after we are born. Not everyone has it.

Agape love is described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7: "Love [agape] suffers long and is kind; love envies not; love flaunts not itself and is not puffed up, does not behave itself improperly, seeks not its own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil; rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things." All of the qualities of agape love are inner qualities.

Notice the similarity between this and the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-24: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control; against such there is no law. Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts." These are also all inner qualities. They are what enable the crucifying of the flesh with the affections and lusts. They are the effects of Jesus Christ in our personal lives.

The root Greek words for "love" (Greek, agape) in 1 Corinthians 13 and in Galatians 5 are the same. This is also true of the words "suffers long" in 1 Corinthians 13, and "patient" in the fruit of the Spirit; "kind" in 1 Corinthians 13, and "gentleness" in the fruit of the Spirit; and also

“believes” in 1 Corinthians 13, and “faith” in the fruit of the Spirit. This tells me that agape love is a multifaceted single thing, instead of something that we receive in parts. For example, we have patience in a situation because we are at peace through faith, and we have the temperance to sustain it. We are also able to be kind and gentle. This all adds up to love. The fruit “self-control” is the specific one that moderates lust.

Without agape love from God, the outward displays of love profit us nothing: “And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing” (1 Cor. 13:3).

Agape love’s inner qualities are what enable us to deal with the law of sin, which is our human weakness. The law of sin causes us to perform the sin actions that we do (see Rom. 7:14-23). The sin actions do not cause the law of sin because we are born with this law. We can’t blame all of our issues on what happened to us after we are born even though we are affected by the outside influences. Our lack of willpower is a product of the law of sin and not our subsequent conditioning. This law would be there even if our upbringing was perfect. This is what makes us prone to sin actions. Christ came to give us victory primarily over our human weakness. No amount of self-control can negate this basic weakness. John 1:29 says: “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.’” The word “sin” is singular. We need the Spirit of Christ to be overcomers.

Human effort, without Christ, cannot give us the strength needed to overcome the law of sin. Our willpower is insufficient. Of themselves, our attempts to obey religious rules and regulation do not do it; otherwise, the Mosaic Law would have been sufficient for righteousness. Breathing exercises and transcendental meditations will not do it, even if they are Christian-coated. Attempting to replace bad

thoughts with good thought, even those from the Bible, will not do it. We need to trust in the Lord with all of our hearts and not lean on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5). This is Biblical spirituality. God needs to be part of the solution. We cannot sufficiently clean ourselves up before going to God. If we could, Christ would be unnecessary.

Second Peter 1:4 says: "By which He has given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, so that through these things you might become partakers of the divine nature and escape the corruption that is in the world through lust." Lust is what keeps us excessively attached to the things of the world. This tendency comes from the law of sin. Agape love frees us from being self-absorbed so that we can be more outward and observant of what is happening outside of ourselves, and be better able to respond to it. Love is what gives us the liberty that we have in Christ Jesus from our bondage to the law of sin.

God's love for us does us no good if we don't respond to it. We are told that He resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble; and that we are to draw close to Him, and He will draw close to us (see James 4:6,8). We have to make the first conscious move towards God even though He has drawn us to His Son.

Humility toward God is what exalts us and lifts us. First Peter 5:6-7 provides a working definition for humility: "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time. Cast all your care upon Him, because He cares for you" (see also James 4:6). Another important verse is found in Philippians 4:4-7: "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let everyone come to know your gentleness. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with gratitude, make your requests known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will protect your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." This verse speaks of the fruit of

the Spirit “peace.” This peace that passes all understanding is the result of humility toward God. It is beyond our thoughts. This is the inner rest for our souls that Christ promised us. Leaning on our own understanding does not produce it.

Works are an outgrowth of agape love. Christ “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all lawlessness and purify for Himself a special people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). “And let us consider how to spur one another to love and to good works” (Heb. 10:24). Faith and works are not the same thing, but they always accompany each other, even though our righteousness is established by our faith in Jesus Christ.

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